Circular Letter #21.

August 29, 1922

Teaching of Phonics

GOVERNMENT OF PORTO RICO
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
SAN JUAN

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COMMUNICATIONS TO THE
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SAN JUAN, P. R.

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TEACHING OF PHONICS.

To Supervisors of Schools.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

The campaign started last year for teaching PHONICS in the intermediate and grammar grades and in the high schools has proven a success in most of the towns. However, there are a few places yet who did very little, or nothing, last year and the Department of Education wishes to state very emphatically that in every grade above the third the campaign for a better pronunciation must be started immediately and must be kept up during the whole year.

There are two reasons why phonics should be taught in Porto Rico: first, to improve the pupils' pronunciation; second, to prepare them for an intelligent use of the dictionary.

So far, pupils have been given dictionaries to look up the meaning of words. We want them to go one step farther and find the correct pronunciation of words independently without the help of the teacher. This can be done only when one is thoroughly familiar with the sound of every letter as represented by the diacritical mark which it carries. A child should be so familiar with these marks that when he sees a letter with its diacritical mark he should hear the sound it represents in the same way that a musician hears the sound represented by a note on the staff.

In order to help the children to retain every scund learned he should be taught to associate each sound with a word called the *key word.* Examples: e with eame; eh with school; k with *kite;* ā with *āte;* etc.

You are requested to supply every teacher above the fourth grade with a copy of **The Morin Phonetic Method to Teach Reading** which will serve as a guide to them for teaching of phonics. They should be asked to add to the list of words already given in the method other more difficult words containing similar sounds.

In order to help the teachers to teach phonics when using **The Morin Phonetic Method to Teach Reading** the following explanation about the pronunciation of every sound in each lesson is given:

LESSON 1.

The sound of *b* is obtained by bringing the lips lightly but firmly together. The only difference between the English *b* and the Spanish *b* is that the latter is pronounced not quite so forcibly. The lips are brought together with a feeble contact.

When pronouncing *m* the lips are brought together firmly (as *b*) and the sound is brought

through the nasal passage; then the lips are separated. The proper sound of *m* in the middle or at the end of a word is very hard to pronounce by most Porto Ricans. It is often pronounced ng. Drills on the pronunciation of words like the following should be given:

name, game, came, same, arm, farm, some, come, something, sometimes.

The sound of *n* is given by pressing the palate back of the front teeth with the tip of the tongue (as *d*, *l* and *t*) and letting the voice pass through the nose. The tongue is then dropped into its natural position.

Since this sound at the end of a word is often confused with ng, drills on the pronunciation of words ending in *n* should often be given:

train, cane, green, corn, an, can, man, ran, Dan, hen, pen, Ben, men, run.

The sound of *p* is labial and voiceless. Although it has the same sound as the Spanish *p* our pupils need drilling in words ending with this sound:

help, hope, soup, stop, sheep, hop, rope.

The voiceless sound of *t* is obtained by pressing the tip of the tongue against the back of the upper front teeth. It has the same sound as the Spanish *t*. Our children need to be drilled on the pronunciation of words ending in *t:*

ate, feet, night, kite, write, hat, let, went, it, sit, front.

The English *v* is labio-dental (lip-teeth), voiced, and is produced by forcing the voice through the upper teeth and the lower lip, which are brought together gently but firmly. The proper sound of this letter is reproduced with difficulty by our children for the reason that the Spanish *v* is bilabial. Drills should be given on words like:

gave, have, serve, live, five, wolves, give, above, receive, servant.

LESSON 2.

The sound e k eh is gutteral and voiceless. This sound is easily given by our pupils since it is the same as the Spanish *c* in the word *coco*. Drilling the children on words ending in *k* will be found beneficial:

cake, make, take, week, speak, book, took, look, cook, ask, walk.

The voiced sound of *d* is obtained by pressing the tip of the tongue against the back of the upper front teeth (like *t*). This sound is often difficult to get since the Spanish *d* between two vowels or at the end of a word is pronounced like *th* in *this*. This Spanish pronunciation of the English *d* should be avoided.

The sound of *d* is often pronounced like *t* in Porto Rico. The pupils should be put through exercises like the following:

Exercise 1.		Exercise 2.	
do,	not *"tho"*	and,	not *"ant"*
did,	not *"thid"*	hand,	not *"hant"*
day,	not *"thay"*	bad,	not *"bat"*
dark,	not *"thark"*	read,	not *"reat"*
dance,	not *"thance"*	feed,	not *"feet"*
draw,	not *"thraw"*	ride,	not *"rite"*
doll,	not *"tholl"*	side,	not *"site"*

The sound of *f* is voiceless and is obtained by forcing the voice between the lower lip and the upper front teeth which are brought together lightly. It is the same as the Spanish *f*.

The hard sound of *g* is gutteral and voiced. It has the same sound as the Spanish *g* in the word *gato*.

As it is often pronounced like *k* in Porto Rico the children need practice on the following exercise:

flag, not *"flak"*	pig, not *"pik"*
big, not *"bik"*	bag, not *"bak"*

The *h* sound is aspirate—it is a breath. The sound is about the same as the Spanish *j* in Porto Rico. Our pupils need drills on the pronunciation of words containing *h*, especially when it appears in the diagraph *wh* (=hw), as in:

what, white, while, where, when.
here, he, high, home, hope, hear, hold.

LESSON 3.

The letter *j* is a voiced consonantal diphthong and is equivalent to *dzh*. It is often confused in Porto Rico with *y*. An exercise like the following will be found beneficial:

James, not *"Yames"*
Jack, not *"Yack"*
Jill, not *"Yill"*
John, not *"Yon"*
Joe, not *"Yoe"*

The sound of *l* is obtained by touching the palate with tip of the tongue just back of the front teeth and letting the voice pass on both sides of the tongue. It is a voiced sound.

The middle part of the tongue is lowered more when pronouncing the English *l* than is the case when giving the proper sound of the Spanish *l*. For that reason our pupils need drill work on words containing the letter *l*.

leaves, Lee, like, long, lost, while, school, pull, all, wall.

The *ch* sound is equivalent to *tsh*. Our children get this sound easily as it has the same sound as the Spanish *ch* in the word *mucho*.

The voiced sound of ng is gutturosnasal. The two letters form a composite sound. There are two incorrect pronunciations of this sound which we hear in Porto Rico when it occurs at the end of a word. Some pronounce it like *in:* *Mornin* for *morning*, *comin* for *coming*. Others pronounce it correctly but end by adding the hard sound of *g:* Sing–g ring–g, sing–ging–g, ring–ging–g.

Frequent drills should be given with words like the following:

sing,	not *"sin"*	nor *"sing–g"*
string,	not *"strin"*	nor *"string–g"*
swing,	not *"swin"*	nor *"swing–g"*
king,	not *"kin"*	nor *"king–g"*
ringing,	not *"rinin"*	nor *"ring–ging–g"*
singing,	not *"sinin"*	nor *"sing–ging–g"*
swinging,	not *"swinin"*	nor *"swing–ging–g"*

The sound of *r* is voiced. It is produced by bringing the tip of the tongue near the palate back of the front teeth. The tongue is retracted, forming a hollowing back of the point.

We should not, in Porto Rico, try to imitate the pronunciation of the *r* as it is pronounced in New England and in many of the southern states where most people give it the *ə* or *ä* sound if not left out entirely. We should not say *fathə* or *fathä* for *fathər; rulə* or *rulä* for *rulər.*

The American *r* is not trilled; that is, the tip of the tongue is not vibrated as is the case with the Spanish *r*. The gutteral *r* which we hear often in Porto Rico should be avoided also.

Exercises like the following should be given:

Exercise 1.	Exercise 2.	Exercise 3.
read	Grace	her
ride	tree	here
write	three	near
Rose	green	more
room	throw	door
run	grow	your
ran	broom	are

LESSON 4.

The sound of *s* (sharp s) is voiceless and is the same as the Spanish *s*. No difficulty will be encountered when teaching this sound.

The voiceless sound of *th* is the same as the Spanish *z* or *c* before *e* and *i*. There should be no difficulty for our children in getting this sound properly, especially if they have been taught the equivalent Spanish sound. However, drill work on the following words will be found helpful:

three, throw, through, cloth, thank, think, throat, something.

The voiced [1] *th* is equal to *dth*. This sound is rather difficult to reproduce and our pupils need drilling on words like:

they, their, the, this, these, those, there, that, with, mother, father, brother.

[1] The *th* should have a bar through it.

The sound of *sh* is voiceless and is formed with a narrow opening between the blade of the tongue, just behind the tip, and the back upper gums, at a place somewhat farther back than for *s*. This is a very difficult sound for Porto Rican children since there is no equivalent sound in the Spanish language. At the beginning of a word there is a tendency, here, to give it the *ch* sound and to pronounce it like *s* when found at the end of a word.

Exercise 1.	Exercise 2.
she, not *"che"*	English, not *"Englis"*
should, not *"chould"*	Spanish, not *"Spanis"*
shall, not *"chall"*	push, not *"pus"*
shoes, not *"choes"*	wash, not *"was"*
short, not *"chort"*	wish, not *"wis"*

The voiced sound of *w* is the same as the Spanish *u* only the lips are closed more.

Our children encounter no difficulty in getting this sound in words like: was, well and will, but many do if the *w* is followed by the o͝o sound. An exercise like the following will be found helpful:

would, not *"ould"*	woods, not *"oods"*
wolf, not *"olf"*	woman, not *"oman"*

LESSON 5.

The pronunciation of *wh* is *hw* (who). Our children need to be drilled on the pronunciation of this combination of sounds since they often leave out the *h* sound: while, white, whose, where, what.

The pronunciation of *qu* is *kw* (ko͝o). This combination of sounds is easily obtained by our pupils.

The sound of *x* is *ks*. Drills should be given on the pronunciation of the following words: box, ox, fox, six.

The sound of *y* as a consonant is y̆. Since this sound is often given in Porto Rico a *ch* sound, drill work should be given on the pronunciation of the following words: you, your, yard, yes.

The sound of *z* (z̧) is voiced. Since this sound is not found in the Spanish language and is difficult to get by our children. Drills should be given them often on the pronunciation of the following words: dayş, playş, Jameş, hearş, beanş, haş, boyş, girlş, birdş, handş, cloşe, Roşe.

After teaching all the sounds of the consonants the sounds of the vowels should be taught.

The names of the different diacritical marks used in the method should be known by every teacher and by the pupils from the fourth grade up. The third-grade pupils should be trained to interpret these marks—that is, they should be able to get the proper sound of a letter through the mark it has, but he need not know the names of the marks. The diacritical marks are called as follows: ā, macron; s̄, suspended bar; ă, breve; ä, two dots; ȧ, one dot; â, circumflex; ã, tilde, or wave line; ç̧, cedilla; and e̱, bar.

The long sounds of the vowels: ā, ē, ī, ō, and ū (Lesson 6–15) are merely the names of these letters. All these sounds are easily pronounced with the exception of ō. There is a tendency in Porto Rico to give the latter the sound of the Spanish *o* which is nearer to short ŏ than long ō. In order

to get this sound correctly it is necessary to round one's lips. Our children need drill on the following exercise:

ōwn, not *"ŏn"*
nōte, not *"nŏt"*
gōat, not *"gŏt"*
hōpe, not *"hŏp"*
fōur, not *"fôr"*
cōat, not *"cŏt"*

Comparatively speaking, there are no truly long vowels in Spanish. They are either short or medium long. For this reason our pupils must be trained to give all long vowels their full value. They should be made to exaggerate when drilling on long sounds. Let them think of long ā as *āā;* long ē as *ēē;* etc.

The sound o͝o, o͞o, u͝, Lesson 16, commonly called *long double* o͞o, it is the same as the Spanish *u* only it is a longer sound.

The sound o͝o o͡o u͝, Lesson 18, is about the same in quality as the preceding sound only it is short. It is called *short double* o͡o. It has the same sound as the Spanish *u.*

Since our pupils find it difficult to distinguish between the two sounds mentioned above they should be drilled on the following exercise:

LONG.	SHORT.
go͞ose	go͡od
sho͝e	sho͝uld
fo͞od	fo͡ot
co͞ol	co͝uld

The sound ä, Lesson 21, is like the Spanish *a* with the exception that it is longer. It is generally called *Italian a.*

The sound å in Lesson 23 is between ä and ă but nearer the latter than the former.

Broad a͟ ô in Lesson 24 is reproduced with difficulty by most Porto Ricans. There is a tendency to give it the long sound of ō or the short sound of ŭ. Our pupils should be drilled on the following exercise:

fa͟ll, not *"fōl"*
ba͟ll, not *"bōl"*
ta͟ll, not *"tōl"*
wa͟ll, not *"wŭll"*
wa͟lk, not *"wŭk"*

To obtain this sound properly one must open his mouth wide and bring the sound down. The lips must not be rounded as in long ō.

The sound of a͟ ŏ, Lesson 26, is one half of the preceding sound. This sound is very often incorrectly produced by our pupils who give it the sound of short ŭ. They should be drilled in reading of words like the following:

EXERCISE 1.

was, not *"wŭs"*
wash, not *"wŭsh"*
watch, not *"wŭtch"*

EXERCISE 2.

dŏll, not *"dŭll"*
dŏg, not *"dŭg"*
stŏck, not *"stŭck"*

The short sound of ă is perhaps the most difficult sound in the English language for Porto Ricans. The tendency is to give it the sound of either ä or å. The sound is short in name only. It is, as pronounced in the United States, medium long.

In order to get this sound properly the voice must be brought to the front part of the mouth and the sound flattened. Drill on the reading of words like those found below will be found helpful to the pupils:

căt, not *"cät"*
căn, not *"cän"*
hănd, not *"händ"*
făn, not *"fän"*
cătch, not *"cätch"*

The short sound of ĕ found in Lesson 32 causes no trouble to our pupils.

Short ĭ ў can be given easily by any child in Porto Rico. It is the same sound as the Spanish *i*. Through carelessness on the part of many it is often confused with long ē.

Our children should be led to distinguish between these two sounds by drilling then on the reading of the following words:

EXERCISE 1.

SHORT.	LONG.
ĭt	ēat
sĭt	sēat
mĭt	mēat / meet
thĭs	thēse
slĭp	sleep
fĭt	feet

EXERCISE 2.

pĭg, not *"peeg"*
bĭg, not *"beeg"*
lĭttle, not *"leetle"*
fĭg, not *"feeg"*
wĭll, not *"weel"*
ĭs, not *"eese"*

Short ŭ ọ, Lesson 40, is easily obtained by our children, yet it is very often confused with short ŏ. Note the following exercise:

rŭn, not *"rŏn"*
sŭn, sŏn, not *"sŏn"*
ŭp, not *"ŏp"*

dọes, not *"dŏes"*
sọme, not *"sŏme"*
cọme, not *"cŏme"*

The sound of ā ē ī ō û ў in Lesson 48 is one of the sounds nearly always incorrectly given by our children. It is given the *e* sound in the Spanish word *ser*, which is equivalent to â in the word câre with the difference that the latter is longer.

The *ȧ* in Lesson 52 and *ă* in Lesson 58 also have the same sound as ē.

The diphthong oi oy in Lesson 50 is pronounced (ạ'ĭ) and is equivalent to *oy* in the Spanish word *hoy*.

The diphthong ou ow in Lesson 50 is pronounced (ä'o͝o) and is equivalent to *au* in the Spanish word *jaula*.

Abridged å, ė, o͝ and ů in Lessons 53, 54, 55 and 56 are one half of ā, ē, ō, and ū.

The sounds *ȧ, ă,* å, ė, o͝ and ů occur in unaccented syllables. Examples: *ȧ*way, finăl, senåte, ėvent, tō͝mato, natůre.

The following sounds which are not found in **The Morin Phonetic Method,** should be taught to the pupils of the different grades above the third:

Obscure short *ĕ* found in unaccented syllables in words like: movemĕnt, fervĕnt, prudĕnt, novĕl, angĕl.

Obscure short *ŏ* occurs in unaccented syllables: ŏffend, ŏccur, ŏccasion, cŏnnect.

Obscure short *ŭ*—also found in unaccented syllables: circŭs, surplŭs, minŭs, typhŭs, sŭbmit.

The consonant *x* has another sound besides (*ks*), which is *gz*. Examples: *examination, exist, example, exempt.*

When teaching phonics to Porto Rican children one soon discovers that it is not always a matter of *quality* (proper sounds), but is often a matter of *quantity* (length of sounds). Since this is really a weak point in our children they should be drilled on exercises specially prepared to compare sounds for their difference in quantity, such as: fāce, prefăce; ēase, ĭs; pōle, pŏlice; tūbe, tŭberculosis; fo͞ol, fu̱ll; fär, fȧst; wa̱ll, wa̱s.

During the year, while on inspection tours, tests will be given to the different grades by a representative of the Department who is specially interested in this line.

You are requested to supply your rural, graded and high-school teachers with a copy of this letter.

Respectfully yours,

(Signed) **JUAN B. HUYKE,**
Commissioner of Education.